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The Jewish Quarterly Review.

APRIL, 1889.

WHERE ARE THE TEN TRIBES?

III.

EARLY TRANSLATORS OF THE BIBLE AND COMMENTATORS :
ABRAHAM BAR HIYYA, BENJAMIN OF TUDELA, PRESTER
JOHN, OBADIAH OF BERTINORO, ABRAHAM LEVI AND HIS
CONTEMPORARIES.¹

WE have seen in the second part of our essay that the doubtful Eldad² of the Tribe of Dan³ found the lost Tribes

¹ The Hebrew documents from MSS. and rare books are to be found in the קובץ על יד *Sammelband* III., published by the Society of the *M'Kitsé Nirdamim*, Berlin, 1889.

² We forgot to mention, in our Bibliography of Eldad's Diary (*Jewish Quarterly Review*, II., p. 110), the MS. of the Casanatense, Rome V., II. 11. It contains the text C by a very careless scribe. There are many omissions, as well as some additions, and in many passages no sense can be made out. The seven nations (לשונות) in the MS. are the following נִרְמָא (or טַרְמָא); קוֹקִיָּה • סַרְמוֹתָם • אֲרָא • תִּיִּסְקָא • חוֹקְרָא • תִּיִּקָּא (*Jewish Quarterly Review*, I., p. 100). At the end we find the following passage:—וְאֵלֶּדֶד זֶה לֹא הוֹתִיר וְלֹא-הַפְחִית מְכַל מַה שֶּׁרָאָה אֱלָא הַלְשׁוֹן וּבִשְׁבַת הַנְּבִיאִים כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד בְּדוֹרוֹ דְּרִשׁוּ תוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה ע"ה וְעַד עַתָּה הֵם מַחְזִיקִים בְּאִילוֹ הַפְּרוֹשִׁים וְיֵשׁ לֵהֶם הָעֵבֹר וּס' הַיְסוּדוֹת וְשֵׁם הַנְּמַפּוֹרֶשׁ שֶׁמִּשְׁמָשִׁים בּוֹ הַצִּדִּיקִים וְעוֹד הֵם מְרַבִּים חֲכָמָה וְאִלִּיָּהוּ (*sic*) מִתְּרָאָה וּמִתְבַּשֵּׁר וְאוֹמֵר בְּרוּךְ שֶׁהַחֲיִינוּ וְהוֹדִיעֵנו בְּשׁוֹדוֹת טוֹבוֹת מֵאַחֲנֵינוּ " שְׁבָטִים הַמְּקוֹם בְּרַחֲמֵינוּ Benjamin of Tudela's Diary, in a similarly corrupted form, and no help can be derived from the MS. for a critical edition of this important work, which is generally required.

³ We find a Danite amongst the martyrs of the first crusade (p. 20 of the second volume of the *Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, in the Press).

in Abyssinia or Ethiopia. In the following period (tenth to twelfth century) they are looked for partly in Babylonia, Persia, and India; whilst later writers indicate their existence again in Abyssinia, Algeria, and the African deserts. Each author (excepting the exegetes and translators) has his own story and arguments. Let us begin with the translators.

The translations by Saadyah (S'adyah) Gaon (who died about 941), of the Books of Kings and Chronicles are unfortunately lost, and so are those of the early Karaites; they were all composed in Arabic. In Psalm xc. Saadyah explains the heading "Prayer of Moses," as "Prayer to be recited by the children of Moses," meaning those mentioned in 1 Chronicles xxiii. 14-23, and not the fictitious Levites on the river Sambatyon.¹ Fortunately, Moses ben Ezra (eleventh century), in his Arabic *Ars Poetica*, has preserved Saadyah's explanation of the countries to which, according to the Book of Kings, the tribes were exiled. Speaking of the Jews forgetting Hebrew in the Babylonian exile, Saadyah says:—"And such was the case with the other exiles of Samaria, who went to the lands of Khorasan, for there is not the slightest doubt that Halah, Habor, the river of Gozan, and the cities of the Medes (2 Kings xvii. 6), are to be found in Khorasan. Habor is most probably the river Khaboor (Chaboras of Ptolemy, which is written חבור as well as כחבור). All this is well known here." To this Moses ben Ezra adds that a man told him that in those provinces 40,000 Jews still existed who paid tribute.² Karaite authors of the tenth century also mention Khorasan as the province where the Israelitish exiles settled.³ The famous Judah ben Balam (who lived about 1020),⁴ whom we may regard as the pearl of the Jewish exegetes, follows Saadyah. He says (Isaiah vii. 24) that "in the time of Josiah the tribes were in Khorasan, for Habor is most probably the Chaforas, and the Gozan is to be found near to the town of Gazna, which in our time is situated further from Khorasan."⁵ R. Tanhum of Jerusalem (thirteenth century) repeats Saadyah in saying (2 Kings xviii. 11) "these towns are in the land of

¹ *Sammelband*, III., p. 10.

² See for the original text, with a Hebrew translation by Dr. Harkavy, his מאסף נרחים, No. 7.

³ For instance, Japhet ben Eli (who lived tenth century) in his Arabic commentary on Isaiah lvi. 8. (MS. at St. Petersburg, 562, of the first Firkowitsch collection), but he also mentions those exiles in the desert and behind the river of Sabbath (Sambatyon).

⁴ See M. J. Derenbourg's edition of his Glosses to Isaiah, in the *Revue des Etudes Juives*, xvii., p. 176.

⁵ Dr. Harkavy, *l. c.*

Khorasan; Gozan is, as it is said, the river of Gazna, and Habor is the Khabur."¹ One anonymous Arabic translator gives the following names, which are to be found in Khorasan, or in its neighbourhood. He translates 2 Kings xvii. 6:—"He placed them in Halwân (a province of Nisabur), Herat, the rival of Azerbaijân (a Persian province, with the capital Tebriz), and the towns of Mahat (Nehawend)."² The author evidently followed the Talmudic explanation.³ Western commentators, who wrote in Hebrew, viz., Rashi, Abraham ibn Ezra, Kimhi (or more correctly Kamhi), and others, do not explain these geographical names. Assyrian inscriptions have not advanced the question much. "Chabor," says Professor Schrader,⁴ "is found in an inscription of Assurnâsirhabal as Habor." Gozan is mentioned as Guzana, along with Nizibis, and is, therefore, to be looked for, according to Professor Schrader, in Mesopotamia—probably identical with the province *Tavṣavîtis*, given by Ptolemy. "The land of Media" is clear. No identification has yet been attempted for Halah. Professor Fried. Delitzsch's⁵ identification of Gozan with the province Zoozan or Zewezân, situated between the mountains of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Diarbekir and Mossool⁶ will find some confirmation in the anonymous Jewish translator mentioned above.

The great astronomer, Abraham bar Hiyya (twelfth century) strangely enough makes an allusion to the children of Moses. Speaking of the difference between the Jewish tradition which holds that there are seventy nations, whilst the non-Jewish authors mention seventy-two, he says that the two nations of the latter tradition refer, 1st, to the children of Moses, of whom God said, "And I will make of thee a great nation" (Exodus xxxii. 10), for their number at the time of the arrival of the Messiah will be so great that they will form a nation; 2nd, to the sons of Levi.⁷ Abraham bar Hiyya does not mention the country in which they dwelt.

More particulars concerning the tribes near Persia we shall find in the diary of the famous Benjamin of Tudela.⁸ The

¹ Dr. Harkavy, *l. c.*

² MS. Oxford, No. 180 of our Catalogue, fol. 225, תם אסכנהם בחלואן (MS. ותראה) ונהר אדרבינאן ובלאר מאהאח.

³ See *La Géographie du Talmud*, p. 372.

⁴ "The Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament" (Whitehouse's Translation from the German) I., p. 267.

⁵ *Wo lag das Paradies*, p. 185.

⁶ See M. Barbier de Meynard, *Dictionnaire Géographique, Historique et Littéraire de la Perse, etc.*, Par., 1861, p. 290.

⁷ *Sammelband*, III., p. 10.

⁸ See below, p. 189.

traveller Petahiah, of Regensburg, has not a word about them.

Towards the middle of the twelfth century news reached Europe that a powerful Christian King, named Prester John, was reigning in Asia, and more especially over India.¹ In the fifteenth century we shall find Prester John's kingdom in Ethiopia. In fact, India and Ethiopia were at that time regularly taken one for the other. How the fable of a Christian Kingdom in India arose it is not our purpose to explain. We may, nevertheless, offer the following remarks: If St. Thomas, the Apostle of India, is, according to M. Rénan, a corruption of Gotama, the name for Buddha, Prester John might be a corruption of the name of one of the great Mongolic conquerors, invented to encourage the Christian world, which was trembling (in 1144) at the victories of the Seldtshuks in Syria, and later on at those of Tshingiz Khan. These hordes were considered as the terrible Gog and Magog, and brought to mind the time of anti-Christ and the destruction of the world. It will be sufficient for our purpose to mention that Otto, of Freisingen, who is the first that mentions the Prester John, says:—"The Bishop of Gabala (Djebel in Syria) relates that a few years ago a king and priest John, whose kingdom is far East on the other side of Persia and Armenia, and whose nation consists of Nestorian Christians, made war against the royal brothers of the Persians and the Medes, and took their residence, Ecbatana. The battle against the Persian, Median, and Assyrian troops lasted three days, for both parties were resolved to die rather than to give way." Further particulars about Prester John's descent from the Magi, and his intention to help the Crusaders do not belong to our subject. We mention him solely for the two following reasons:—1st, in order to state, with Dr. Oppert,² that the *Kofar al Turak* mentioned by Arabic historians and by Benjamin of Tudela,³ are identical with the subjects of the fabulous Prester John; 2nd, to give the passage concerning the Ten Tribes, which is found in the Hebrew translation of his pretended letters; it will follow the extract from Benjamin's famous diary.

After giving a description of Samarcand, Benjamin continues as follows, according to the information of R. Moses, for

¹ See Dr. Gustav Oppert's Book, *Der Presbyter Johannes in Sage und Geschichte*, Berlin, 1864; also Colonel Yule's excellent article on Prester John in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (ninth edition), Vol. XIX., p. 714 *sqq.*

² *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

³ See below, p. 190.

our traveller never visited the regions of which we give his description :—¹

Ten days from Samarcand is the province of Tibet (Toobut), in the forest of which country that beast is to be found which yields the musk. There are twenty-eight days to the mountains of Nisabur,² situated on the river Gozan. There are Jews in Persia, who are from this part, who say that in the towns of Nisabur dwell four tribes of Israel, viz., Dan, Asher, Zebulon and Naphtali, being of the first exiles who were carried into captivity by Salmanasser, King of Assyria, as said in Kings, "He put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes." The extent of their country is twenty days' journey, and they have provinces and great cities in the mountains, and on one side the river Gozan makes the boundary. They are subject to no nation, but are governed by their own prince, whose name is Rabbi Joseph Amarkala, the Levite. Amongst them are scholars; others carry on agriculture; whilst a number of them are engaged in war with the land of Cush, by way of the desert. They are in alliance with the Kofar al Torak,³ who adore the wind and live in the desert. This is a nation who eat no bread and drink no wine, but live upon raw meat, unprepared; they have no noses, but instead of the noses they have two small holes, by means of which they breathe. They eat all sorts of meat, whether from clean or unclean beasts, but they are friendly to Israel.

About eighteen years ago, they invaded Paras with a numerous host, and took the city of Rai, which they smote with the edge of the sword, took all the spoil, and returned to the desert. Nothing similar was seen before in Paras; and when the king of that country became acquainted with the occurrence, his wrath was kindled, for, said he: [In my time and]⁴ in the time of my fathers no host like this ever issued from the desert; I will go and extinguish their name from the earth. He raised the war cry in the whole empire, collected all his troops, and made inquiry whether he could find any guide that would show him the place where his enemies pitched their tents.

A man was met with, who spoke thus to the king: "I will show thee the place of their retreat, for I am of them"; and the king promised to enrich him if he would act thus, and show him the way. Upon the king's inquiry how much provision would be necessary for this long way through the desert, the spy answered: "Take with you bread and water for fifteen days, as you will find no provisions whatever before you reach their country." Thus they did, and travelled fifteen days in the desert, and as they met with nothing that could serve for sustenance, they became extremely short of provisions, so that men and beasts began to die. The king called for the spy, and addressed him thus: "What becomes of thy promise to show us our enemy?" He replied, "I have mistaken my

¹ We follow Asher's translation, except in some passages, which we shall point out in the notes.

² נִסְבֹּר according to the MS. of the British Museum. Asher's reading נִסְבֵּן for נִסְבֹּר, which is to be found in the printed copies, is not to be recommended; neither is Dr. Oppert right in his rendering of נִסְבֵּן by Nekhsheb. Nisabur is mentioned by Benjamin in connection with the Gozan on p. 78 of Asher's edition.

³ For the discussion concerning this tribe we refer to Dr. Oppert's *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁴ The words in brackets are added from the MS. of the British Museum.

way." The king grew angry, and ordered the head of the spy to be cut off. Orders were given to the host that every one who had any provisions left should share them with his companions. After everything eatable was consumed, including even the beasts, and after travelling thirteen additional days in the desert, they at last reached the mountains of Nisabur,¹ where the Jews dwell. They arrived there on a Sabbath,² and encamped in the gardens and orchards and near the springs, which are on the side of the river Gozan. It being the fruit season, they ate and destroyed, but no living being came forward. On the mountains, however, they discovered cities and many towers; the king commanded two of his servants to go and to inquire the name of the nation which inhabited these mountains and to cross over to them, either in boats or by swimming the river. They at last discovered a large bridge, fortified by towers, and secured by a locked gate, and on the other side of the bridge a considerable city.

They shouted on their side of the bridge until at last a man came forth to inquire what they wanted, and to whom they belonged. They could not, however, make themselves understood, and fetched an interpreter, who spoke both languages; the questions being repeated, they replied: "We are servants of the King of Persia, and we have come to inquire who you are, and whose subjects." The answer was: "We are Jews; we acknowledge no king or prince of the nations, but we are subjects of a Jewish prince." Upon inquiries after the Kofar al Torak,³ the Jews answered: "Verily, they are our allies, and whoever seeks to harm them we consider our own enemy." The two men returned and reported this to the King of Paras, who became much afraid. The second day the Jews offered him battle. The king replied: "I am not come to make war against you, but against the Kofar al Torak, who are my enemies, and if you attack me, I will certainly take my vengeance, and will destroy all the Jews of my kingdom, for I am well aware of your superiority over me in my present position. I entreat you to act kindly, and not to harass me, but allow me to fight with the Kofar al Torak, and also sell me as much provision as I want for the maintenance of my army." The Jews took counsel among themselves, and determined to comply with the request of the King of Paras for the sake of his Jewish subjects. The king and all his army were consequently admitted into the country of the Jews, and during his stay of fifteen days he was treated with great honour.

The Jews, however, wrote to their allies, the Kofar al Torak, and made them acquainted with the circumstances given above. These took possession of all the mountain passes, and assembled a considerable army, consisting of all the inhabitants of that desert, and when the King of Paras went forth to give them battle, the Kofar al Torak were victorious, and slew so many of the army of Paras, that the king escaped to his country with only very few followers.

One of the horsemen of the retinue of the king enticed R. Moses, a

¹ According to the MSS., printed text נסבון.

² According to the MS. of the British Museum; the printed texts have ביום alone, which gives no sense. Asher puts this word in parentheses.

³ The text is here corrupted. The British Museum MS reads as follows:— וישאלו אותם על דבר הכופרים שהם בני גוי מן כופר אלתורך, "And they asked concerning the infidels, which are the Ghuzes, of the Kofar al Torak." If this reading is right, Asher has reason to identify the Kofar al Torak with the Ghuzes. We cannot discuss this question here.

Jew of that country, to go along with him; in Paras he made him a slave. Upon a certain day, however, the king witnessed a sport, carried on for his amusement, which consisted chiefly of bow-shooting; R. Moses excelled all other competitors. The king inquired after this man with the help of an interpreter, and was told what happened to him, and how the horseman deceived him. Upon learning that, the king immediately granted him his liberty, and gave him a dress of fine linen and silk, together with other presents. The king said to him: "If thou wilt turn to our religion, I shall be gracious towards thee, make thee rich, and, moreover, steward of my palace." R. Moses replied: "I cannot do such a thing." Then the king placed him in the house of R. Sar Shalom of the Ispahan congregation, who in his turn gave him his daughter as his wife. It was this R. Moses who related to me all these things.

So far for the report concerning four tribes. In another place of his diary (Asher's edition, p. 70) Benjamin says:—

From Hella (in Babylonia)¹ twenty-one days' journey through the desert of Sheba or al-Yeman (Yemen), situated towards Shinear in a northerly direction, are the abodes of the Jews who are called *Khaibar*,² men of Thema; here is the seat of their government, where the prince Hanan resides. It is a large city, and the extent of their country is sixteen days' journey between the northern mountain range. They possess large and strong cities, and are not subject to any of the nations, but undertake warlike expeditions into distant provinces with the Arabians, their neighbours and their allies. These Arabs live in tents in the deserts, and have no fixed abode, and are in the habit of undertaking marauding expeditions in the land of Shinear and al-Yeman. The Jews are the terror of their neighbours, their country being very extensive; some of them cultivate the land and rear cattle. A number of studious and learned men, who spend their lives in the study of the Law, are maintained by the tithes of all produce, part of which is also employed towards sustaining the poor and the ascetics, called "mourners of Zion," and "mourners of Jerusalem." These eat no meat and abstain from wine, dress always in black, and live in caves or in hidden-away³ houses, and keep fasts all their lives except on Sabbath and feast-days. They continually implore the mercy of God for the Jews in exile, and devoutly pray that he may have compassion on them for the sake of his own great name, and they include in their prayers all the Jews of Tema and Telmas. Telmas is a city of considerable magnitude; it contains about 100,000 Jews, who are governed by Prince Salmon, brother of the Prince Hanan, to both of whom the land belongs; they are descendants of the royal house of David, which is proved by their pedigrees. In doubtful cases they refer to their relative, the prince of the captivity at Bagdad.⁴ They keep forty days' fasts every year, and pray

¹ The MSS. have after the word קבריהם (ed. Asher, p. 69), the following words:—ומשם חמשה ימים לחילה.

² According to the Oxford MS.; the British Museum MS. has בני כיבר, children of Khaibar; the printed texts and another MS. read בני רכב, the Rechabites.

³ According to MSS., which read גנויים for the printed גנויים.

⁴ The MSS. read לראש הנולה קרובם שבבגדאד, instead of the strange words בגדים בגדים in the printed texts.

for all the Jews who live in exile. There are nearly forty provinces,¹ and two hundred villages and towns. The chief province is Sana.² There are altogether 300,000 Jews. Sana³ is a very strong city, being fifteen square miles in extent, and large enough to allow agriculture to be carried on within its boundaries, where the palace of the Prince Salmon is to be found. Tema, the province of the Prince Hanan, his brother, is also a beautiful town with gardens; so is Telmas also a great town with 100,000 Jews, strongly fortified and situated between two high mountains. Many of the inhabitants are learned, wise and rich. From Telmas to Khaibar is three days' journey.

It is reported that these Jews are of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Menasseh, who were led away captives by Salmanesser, King of Assyria, and brought there. They built there strong cities, and are in warfare with many kingdoms, and they cannot easily be reached because of their situation, which requires a march of eighteen days through uninhabited deserts, and thus renders them difficult of access. Khaibar is also a large city with 50,000 Jews in it, of whom many are learned. They are valiant and engaged in wars with the inhabitants of Shinear, with those of the northern country, and with those of Yemen who live near them; the latter province borders India.

According to the letters of the Prester John, the tribes form a strong kingdom in India. We translate the following passage from the text of the Constantinople edition³:—

“Know that from the stone-sea flows a river, which comes from Paradise, passing between us and the great country of the mighty Daniel, King of the Jews. This river flows all the week days, but remains quiet on the Sabbath day. When full, this river carries a great quantity of precious stones; consequently, no one can pass it except on the Sabbath. But we watch the Jews, for if they should pass they would cause great mischief to the whole world, to the Christians, the Ishmaelites, as well as to all the nations and tongues under the Heaven, for no nation could resist them. But we have in this region sixteen great and fortified cities, built of stones, which we may call the strongest cities in the world. The distance from one town to the other is half a mile; each city is provided with a thousand horsemen, ten thousand foot soldiers, and ten thousand archers, who watch the mountains and its passages, in order not to let the Jews pass; they are, indeed, so numerous that if they once cross over, they could fight the whole world. Know also, that for each of my fortresses the King Daniel possesses ten; the Jews are so rich in precious stones that they construct their houses with them, as we do with coloured stones. Do not consider as

¹ כְּרִינֹת, which also means large cities.

² תְּנַאי in the MSS.

³ See *Sammelband*, III., p. 14.

exaggerated what I reported concerning the King Daniel, for he has with him three hundred Jewish kings, whose peoples have submitted to him; besides these, Daniel has also three thousand dukes, counts, and other important men; in fact, we know that his land is endless; and he who has never heard of this people has heard nothing."

In the letter addressed to the Emperor Frederick the passage relating to the Jews runs as follows¹:—

"On the one side of our country is a river, on the border of which all kinds of excellent spices are found. Near to it is another river, full of stones, which falls into the ocean, which flows between the sea and the Nine Tribes of Israel. This river runs all the week till the Sabbath day, when it rests; it carries large and small stones to the sea, like a river of water does; consequently the Nine Tribes of Israel cannot pass the river. On the other side we have forty-four towns, built of very strong stones, and the distances between one town and another is not more than a bowshot. And in order to guard them we have 44,000 horsemen, 50,000 bowmen, and 30,000 men on horseback guard the cities from an attack by the children of Israel, for if they could pass the river they would destroy the world. The Israelites possess ten of the cities. We make known to you that for these ten cities, and for other expenses which we are obliged to make for the great King of Israel, he gives us yearly a hundred camels, loaded with gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; besides this he pays a tribute for our not ravaging the land which lies between us and themselves. Know also, that the great King of Israel has under his dominion 200 kings, who hold their lands only with his permission. Besides these kings there are 2,300 governors and princes. In his countries flow two rivers coming from the Garden of Eden. On the mountain near our town dwell Gog and Magog; they are called so because they are descendants of two brothers of Israelitish family, the one called Gog and the other Magog, and from them our ancestors have conquered our cities. And at the foot of this mountain, from the side of Israel, we have the great city called כוריאש, which is impregnable, except by treachery."

We feel bound, before continuing to give the opinions of subsequent Jewish writers concerning the Ten Tribes, to say a word on the Hebrew translations of Prester John's letters. The letter of Prester John exists in two forms; one is addressed to the Emperor Frederick, and the other to the

¹ See *Sammelband*. III., p. 19.

Pope.¹ Both of them exist in a Hebrew translation, and the latter even in two forms, the one directed to an anonymous pope, the other, dated 1442, to Pope Eugenius IV. In the first two the Jewish Kingdom in India is described, but not in the last. It is, indeed, strange that this document, which has such a decided Christian tendency, should have been translated into Hebrew; perhaps the translation is the work of a priest, for the language is rather clumsy. We can understand the Jewish object in the translation of the two letters in which the settlement of Jewish tribes is mentioned. The first letter, addressed to the pope, was printed at Constantinople, 1716, and is as rare as a manuscript. It exists also in an Oxford MS. of a late date, copied by a Karaite, but scarcely from the printed edition.² The second letter, addressed to the Emperor Frederick, seems to have been translated in Provence, and exists in the unique MS. (the Parma MS. has only a small fragment) in the possession of the venerable Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, the Rev. Dr. N. Adler, to whom we are glad to express our thanks for the loan of it.³ The third letter,⁴ addressed to the Pope Eugenius IV., is published from the MS. of the Parma library, 402, for a copy of which we are indebted to Dr. L. Modona, one of the officials of this library, which possesses as many as 1,500 Hebrew MSS.

We have mentioned⁵ that the early Karaite writers, and chiefly those who wrote in Arabic, believed that the Ten Tribes dwelt in the neighbourhood of Khorasan. Later Karaite writers, who composed their works at Byzantium, place them in Cush, according to Eldad. So we find it with Judah Hedassi,⁶ who wrote in the year 1160. It is most unlikely that Maimonides, who was so cautious concerning the Messianic advent, as can be seen from his letter, addressed to the congregation of Yemen,⁷ should have made any definite statement about the whereabouts of the Ten Tribes. Still, later authors, such as the apostate Joshua Lorca (Hieronymus de Sancta Fide), pretend⁸ to have found in the letters of Maimonides that the Ten Tribes formed a great

¹ See the five learned monographs, by Professor F. Zarncke, on the history and the letters of Prester John (with various Latin titles), University Programmes. Leipzig, 1874 and 1875.

² *Sammelband*, III., p. 11, *sqq.*

³ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

⁵ See above, p. 186.

⁶ *Eshkol hak-kofer*, §§ 60, 61. See above p. 113.

⁷ *Iggereth Theman*, editio Leipzig, 1861, p. 6.

⁸ J. Oppert, *Der Presbyter Johannes*, etc., p. 18.

nation, of which one part was under the dominion of Paras (Persia), whose king was called by the Arabs the great Sultan, while another part remained independent, in the neighbourhood of the land of Prester John, with whom they made an alliance. Abraham, the son of Maimonides, says in one of his *responsa*,¹ in answer to a question about the Ten Tribes, who are said to be in the desert,² that he can only refer to the passages of the Talmud, the Midrashim, and the story of the Danite, his letter, and the ritual rules, and some Hebrew words which he brought from the land of the Ten Tribes. The last point, adds Abraham, is one of the safest arguments for the existence of the Tribes.

The legend of the Prester John continued to be referred to in Jewish writings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The famous commentator on the Mishnah, R. Obadiah, of Bertinoro, gives the following account in his first letter from Jerusalem in 1488³:—"I have made inquiries concerning the River Sambatyon, but I could obtain no definite information. Certain it is that a man has arrived from the land of the Prester John, which lies between great mountains, and extends ten days' journey, who says that there is the dwelling of the *Bene Israel*, and that they are in continuous warfare with Prester John. He nearly exterminated them, and the small remainder was subjected by him to vexations, which are only equalled by those which the Great Kingdom suffered in the time of the Maccabees. But, with God's mercy, other kings arose in India, less cruel than their predecessor, and the *Bene Israel* were able to lift up their heads, and increased in number. They still pay tribute to the Prester John, but are not subjected to persecutions. Forty years ago they were at war with their neighbours, and prisoners were made on both sides. Some of the *Bene Israel* were brought as prisoners to be sold in Egypt, but the Jews in this country redeemed them. I have seen two of them, who were black, but not so dark as the Cushites (Ethiopians). I could not distinguish whether they were Karaites or Rabbanites, for, on the one hand, they observe the Karaite rule of not having any fire in their houses during the Sabbath-day, and, on the other hand, they follow the Rabbanite prescriptions. They believe themselves to be descendants of the Tribe of Dan, and they say that the pepper and other spices which the Cushites sell come from their land. All this I have seen with my own

¹ *Sammelband*, III., p. 63.

² If we read **צחרא**; the MS. has **סחרא**, distant corners.

³ *Sammelband*, III., p. 22.

eyes, and heard with my own ears, although these men knew but very little Hebrew, and their Arabic could not be well understood by the men of this land. The following fact, however, is well known here—viz., that the Mahommedans, who go on pilgrimage from here to Mekka (and they carry with them not less than 4,000 camels), pass through a great and terrible desert, where they are sometimes attacked by a giant nation of which one pursues a thousand. The name of this nation is, according to the Arabs, ‘Sons of *El Shaddai*,’ because they invoke in their wars the *El-Shaddai*. The Mahommedans assert that each of the Bene El-Shaddai carries a camel load on one shoulder, while with the hand they hold the spear for fighting. It is also well known that they observe the Jewish religion, and it is said that they are the descendants of the Rechabites.”

In his second letter,¹ dated Jerusalem, 1489, Obadiah says: “It is certain, from reports of Mahommedan traders, that fifty days’ journey from Aden in the desert is the River Sambatyon, which surrounds the country where the Bene Israel dwell. This river rolls stones all the week days, and rests only during the Sabbath-day; it is, therefore, impossible for any Jew to go there without profaning the Sabbath. The Bene Israel say that they are the children of Moses; that they are pure as angels, and never transgress the Law. On the other side of the river are also a great number of Jews, but they are not so strict as the children of Moses. These facts are openly proclaimed by the Jews of Aden, who have no doubt about their veracity. Another report reached Jerusalem,” says Obadiah, “that Prester John, with whom the tribes are at war, has defeated them altogether. We fear much for ourselves if this defeat shall become known.”

Another report² was current in Jerusalem in the year 5214—1454 that the Sambatyon was dried up, and that the tribes were crossing to wage war with the Prester John. Thus the legend of this fabulous king was taken advantage of by the Christians, as well as by the Jews.

The famous Kabbalist, Abraham Levi the elder, wrote a letter from Jerusalem, dated 1528, in which we find the following data concerning the Ten Tribes³:—“Know that from Cairo to Suakin are fifty (days). From here to Falasa are three days; according to others, five days; the journey is very difficult. Falasa is a strong kingdom of Jews, who are valiant,

¹ See *Jahrbücher für Geschichte der Juden und des Judenthum*. Leipzig, 1863, III., p. 222.

² *Sammelband*, III., p. 35.

³ *Ib.*, p. 24.

and dwell in tents, travelling from place to place to pasture their flocks. Their land is large, and situated in high mountains, so that no one dares to go to war with them. From Falasa they go to another country called Salima (in Hebrew, Shalem), which flows with milk. Near to these two kingdoms is Jubar, the land of *ששמעליו*,¹ who pay tribute to the King of Falasa. We are not certain to which tribes these Jews belong. We believed up to the present time that they belonged to the tribes of Gad and Dan, for the Mahomedans who came from Jubar say that they are neighbours of Gad and Dan. Lately, however, we have heard that this land is called the land of Gad and Dan after the two brothers who reign there—viz., Gad, the King, and Dan, the Prince. We have further ascertained from the Mahomedans of Jubar and the Christians of Cush, which is Al-Habesh (Abyssinia), that the father of these two brothers was called Phineas, and also Son of the Lion, because of his great strength. He died in battle against the Abyssinians, and left three sons—viz., Gad, Dan, and Todros (Theodorus), who made war one against another. The last escaped to Abyssinia, where he became a Christian, brought a numerous army with him, came suddenly to Salima, and killed there about 10,000 Jews; he could not reach Falasa owing to the high mountains. Finally, Theodorus fell into the hands of his two brothers, who killed him. This slaughter took place in the year 5214—1504. They next fell upon their enemies, and slew a great number of the Abyssinians. Another time Gad was made prisoner by one of the Abyssinian kings, who treated him with kindness, and an agreement was made that Gad should pay a yearly tribute of forty ounces, on promising that he would not give permission to the Portuguese to enter his land." This letter may be of use, for the history of Abyssinia is at present imperfectly known.

A certain Israel, a contemporary of Abraham Levi, sent a letter from Jerusalem to Abraham of Perugia, from which we extract the following fact²:—"Last week, in the days of Hanukah, the Jew who was captured on the sea, and who was sold from hand to hand until he was at last bought at Alexandria in Egypt, where the Jews redeemed him³ (he is nearly like a Cushite), told us that in his native country are thousands and tens of thousands of Jews with a great king, who makes war upon the Christians, their neighbours. He is the only king on the Nile (except that of *סינגלי* (?), which

¹ So in the MS.

² *Sammelband*, III., p. 25, sqq.

³ See above, p. 195.

is forty days' journey from Aden), who has Mahomedan and Christian subjects. This is a certain fact, which many men of his land and all men of Jerusalem affirm, that there are forty families (of Christians and Mahomedans). I had a conversation to-day with the *Nagid* (Prince, a Jewish title) about the Ten Tribes, and he told me that a Jew was staying as a guest in his house, who spoke Cushite and Hebrew. He said that in his country there is no written book of the Oral Law (Talmud), and all casuistical rules are reported in the name of Joshua, son of Nun¹; he said further that there are four tribes—viz., Simeon, Issachar, and two others, which he does not remember. Issachar busies himself day and night with the learning of the Law, whilst the other tribes divide their time between the study of the Law and waging war upon their Christian neighbours. There are many towers on the boundary, in which the valiant men of Israel keep watch; during the war they make signal by smoke in the day and by fire in the night. When they are hard pressed, they ask counsel from heaven and they are answered in the following way. The prince of Issachar envelops himself in his Talith (cloak) and prays in a corner of the synagogue. The answer comes by fire from heaven which everybody sees, descending upon the head of the prince, but the answer is heard by him alone. Once the Cushites brought them a Jew from the Portuguese, to whom they put questions about the exiles, Jerusalem, and the Temple, to which he gave the following answer: 'We are in great troubles, wandering from nation to nation in captivity, the Temple as well as Jerusalem is in ruin and in the hands of strangers.' Hearing this, they tore their garments and wept long and bitterly; they agreed to come in force to Jerusalem, but the prince told them to wait until he asked heaven about it. He did so in the way mentioned above, and the answer was that the time of redemption had not yet come, and therefore nobody should leave his place at present, for the redemption was indeed near. Then came forward ten rich men who made a vow to go from nation to nation and from kingdom to kingdom until they came to Jerusalem. They went in ships with the Cushite till they came to the Portuguese possessions. Here the King sent for them and he heard of their might and riches, and how they fought with the Prester John, and above all how they were answered from heaven, and he was ashamed at the exile to which he had banished the Jews. And in order that it should not be known in his dominions that there was still a

¹ See above, p. 105.

remnant and hope for Israel, he would not allow them to land, and finally sent them to an island where they remained several months. He then sent for them and asked them what they meant to do? They answered that their intention was to go to Jerusalem. He said, Come in my ship and I will bring you to Jerusalem. So they did, but when they got on the open sea they were robbed by pirates, and sold as slaves with their wives and children. After some time one of them came in search of his wife and children and that was the prince's guest in Egypt. As to the wonderful strength of these Jews, the prince stated the following fact. One night four thieves came on the roof of my house and they were all frightened. When the guest asked what the reason of their fright was, they told him what had happened. He at once looked to his sword and hurried alone after them until he put them to flight, saying that if there had been ten thieves it would have been just the same to him, for indeed, said he, 'we slay as many every day when war is waged against us.'

In a third letter from Jerusalem,¹ addressed to the same Abraham by Raphael Trévoux, we find the following short statement about the Ten Tribes. "Know, that the Ten Tribes are not on the other side of the river Sambatyon; but only the children of Moses, and the Ten Tribes dwell on our side of the Sambatyon; they have no Talmud but only the Mishnah, and the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides, and all the Prophets of the First Temple; but they are great Kabbalists." Of course Raphael here confuses the Yemen Jews with the Ten Tribes. The Yemen Jews had, in fact, no copies of the Talmud in Raphael's time, and they regulated questions of religion by Maimonides' casuistical work. They moreover studied mostly the Kabbalah.

In another contemporary letter, addressed from Jerusalem to the congregation of Castello,² the report is that the Viceroy of Naples had heard that the river Sambatyon was now (about 1563) at repose, and four of the tribes had passed the river, whilst the other five tribes were ready to pass. Amongst those who had passed, was a nation numerous as the sand of the sea, with eighty kings and four princes, who carried with them an infinite amount of gold and silver, with armies and heroes too numerous to count. Two other letters,³ addressed to R. Samuel of Sinegaglio, from Venice and Puglia, reached Castello, and speak also of the Ten Tribes. In the one it is reported that during the preceding fortnight a Jew had written from Alexandria wonderful things. "The river Sam-

¹ *Sammelband*, III., p. 32.² *Ibid.*, p. 34.³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

batyon is now dry on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays in a miraculous way by the will of God; myriads of Jews who started from Halah, Habor and the river Gozan have passed the Sambatyon, and are now encamped thirty days' journey from the Holy Land; by command of God they have to remain there two years, after which time they will go and conquer the Holy Land." In the second letter the writer affirms having seen at Damascus an emissary from the tribe of Reuben. Not only did he see him, but he had a glass of wine with him. He came by the way of Egypt, for that was his shortest route. The name of the prince who sent him was Hananel, called also Armilus, because he waged war upon Armilus.¹ The prince belonged to the tribe of Reuben; he was 250 years old, and he passed the Sambatyon, which was completely dry, with sixty times ten thousand warriors, partly Danites and partly of the tribe of Reuben. The Egyptian Jews laughed at him; he therefore left the place without having spoken to many, came to Jerusalem, went to Sebaste² (Sichem), and thence to Damascus. He was waiting there for his two friends. Soon after his arrival at Damascus letters were received from Egypt warning them not to laugh at him, as was wrongly done in Egypt. For a letter reached Egypt from the children of Reuben, signed by twelve princes and also from the great prince and general Hananel, called also Armilus. The continuation of this letter speaks of an old man (Elijah!) who told a Jew of Damascus on his way home from a dinner with the above-mentioned emissary that he would meet an emissary called David, and he was to tell him to make haste with his work and not talk too much. Is this David identical with David Reubeni whom we shall mention later on?³ Probably. Elijah of Pesaro (lived 1532) affirms in his printed letter⁴ that a young Jew told him that in his country the Jews are independent, and that "round them is the nation called Habesh (Abyssinians), who are Christians and in constant warfare with the Jews. These have a language of their own, which is neither Hebrew nor Arabic. They possess the Pentateuch with a commentary, but not the Talmud and its commentaries. Elijah received information as to their religious observances, and he found that they inclined partly to Karaism and partly to Rabbinism, that they have the scroll of Esther but nothing of Hanukkah. Their land is distant from Palæstine six months' journey, and the river Gozan is there."

¹ See above, p. 97.

² The word is doubtful in the MS.

³ See continuation of this article in a later number of the Quarterly.

⁴ *Sammelband*, III., p. 37.

Further on, Elijah says that an old man who was in India told him that "the Jews there form a separate kingdom, that the children of Moses are on an island of the Sambatyon. Facing them is the tribe of Manasseh. On the other side of the river dwell the tribes of Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. Issachar forms a province by itself, and has no communication with the other Tribes. They are well versed in the Law, and are surrounded by fire worshippers, and their language is Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian. Simeon dwells towards the south, and forms a separate kingdom. Zebulun and Reuben are on the river Euphrates, the one on one side and the other on the other side of the river. They possess the Mishnah and the Talmud, and speak Hebrew and Arabic. Ephraim is situated south of Babylonia. They are strong men, who live upon spoil, and speak Hebrew."

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries produced the richest materials and the wildest fictions concerning the lost Tribes. These centuries, in fact, gave birth to the two greatest Messianic impostors—viz., David, of the tribe of Reuben, with his fanatic apostle, Solomon Molkho, and Sabbetai Tzebi, with his numerous followers. With a new Messiah, the legend of the Ten Tribes was forcibly revived.

A. NEUBAUER.

[*To be concluded.*]
